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ABSTRACT

The study described in this report was designed to measure the attitudes of Virginians towards higher education in Virginia and towards some environmental problems facing the Commonwealth. The survey questioned 517 Virginia citizens over age 18 whose households were chosen through random-digit-telephone dialing. Among the findings of the survey were the following: (1) even though Virginians would give a grade of "B" to their state four-year and two-year institutions, 50% of the respondents felt tuition at these same colleges and universities was too high; (2) 54% of those surveyed said they would support a tax increase for higher education; (3) 95% of the respondents could name the community college in their area; and (4) 60% considered community colleges very important to the economy of their communities. Nearly 90% of those surveyed considered Virginia a "good" or "excellent" place to live. Regarding the environment, 89% favored regulation of pesticides and fertilizers, and 94% supported recycling of trash. Additionally, 92% of those surveyed were aware of pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. Respondents expressed a strong concern with the "greenhouse effect," and a majority favored government-funded programs to plant more forests and help people save energy; however, they were also opposed to higher taxes on gasoline, electricity, natural gas, and other kinds of energy. Appendices contain information on characteristics of the sample and survey methodology. (GLR)

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The Virginia Survey

Results from a Statewide Survey on Higher Education and Environmental Problems

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Summary

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to measure the attitudes of Virginians towards higher education in Virginia and towards some environmental problems facing the Commonwealth. Many of the questions in the survey are similar to those used in the national Gallop Poll and an earlier Virginia Survey, "Virginia Attitudes Towards Higher Education" conducted in 1985.

Summary of Research Procedures

1. The Sample.

The sample for the survey consists of 517 Virginia citizens over age 18 whose households were chosen through random digit telephone dialing. The total sample is divided into a representative sample of 231 Northern Virginians (residents of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon and Prince William Counties and the Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church) and a representative sample of 286 citizens of the rest of the state. This allows us to measure the attitudes of the state as a whole and of Northern Virginia. (Details of the sampling and interviewing procedure are described in Appendix Two "How the Study Was Conducted" at the end of this report.)

2. Sampling Error.

The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error for results for all of Virginia is no larger than plus or minus 5%. For Northern Virginia, the chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is no larger than plus or minus 6%.

Summary of Results

Virginia and the Future

•Virginians think highly of the Commonwealth and are concerned about its future.
- -45% rate Virginia an excellent place to live, and an additional 42% rate it good.
- -89% consider a safe, unpolluted environment very important to Virginia's future.
- -75% consider having one of the best higher education systems very important.
- -64% consider having one the best business climates in the nation very important.

Higher Education

•Virginians think highly of the higher education system.
- -43% think the quality of higher education in the state is above average, only 4% think it below average.
- -81% would grade the private colleges and universities in the state "B" or better.
- -79% would grade the public four year colleges and universities "B" or better.
- -69% would grade the community colleges "B" or better.

•Virginians support higher education.
- -63% think access to college is very important.
- -50% think public college and university tuitions are too high.
- -54% would support a tax increase for higher education.
- -52% favor public scholarships for Virginians attending private colleges in-state.

•Community colleges are visible and important.
- -95% can name a community college in their area.
- -60% consider community colleges very important to the economy of thair communitites.
- -33% consider community college tuitions too high.

Environmental Problems

•Virginians are aware of pollution in the Chesapeake and support measures to reduce this pollution.
- -92% are aware of pollution in the Chesapeake.
- -89% favor regulation of pesticides and fertilizers.
- -79% favor regulation of privately owned wetlands.

•Virginians are aware of the "greenhouse effect" and support some but not all policies to prevent it from getting worse.
- -81% are aware of the problem.
- -98% favor energy conservation programs.
- -97% favor reforestation.
- -74% support gas mileage standards for cars.
- -62% oppose nuclear power.
- -79% oppose energy taxes.

•Virginians support household recycling of trash.
- -94% would be willing to separate household trash for a recycling program.

Virginia and the Future

Virginia as a Place to Live

All things considered, how do you rate Virginia as a place to live—would you say it's an excellent place to live, good, fair or a poor place to live?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Excellent	45.3	40.8
Good	42.3	46.5
Fair	10.6	11.0
Poor	1.8	1.8

Influences on Virginia's Future

In determining Virginia's strength in the future, say over the next 10 to 20 years, how important do you feel the following factors will be—would you say they're very important, fairly important, not too important or not at all important?

First, developing one of the best business climates of any state in the nation?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Very important	63.7	55.5
Fairly important	28.9	35.2
Not too important	6.3	7.9
Not at all important	1.1	1.3

Having a safe, unpolluted environment?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Very important	88.6	83.8
Fairly important	10.2	14.5
Not too important	1.2	1.8
Not at all important	0.0	0.0

Having one of the best systems of four-year colleges and community colleges in the nation?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Very important	75.3	67.7
Fairly important	21.4	26.1
Not too important	2.3	5.3
Not at all important	1.0	0.9

Rating Virginia's Colleges and Universities

Rating Quality of Higher Education in Virginia
In relation to colleges and universities nationally, how would you rate the quality of higher education in Virginia? Do you consider it about average, above average or below average?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Above average	42.7	58.2
About average	52.9	37.6
Below average	4.3	4.1

Grading Virginia's Private Colleges and Universities
Students in Virginia's colleges and universities are given the grades of A, B, C, D and F to denote the quality of their work. If you were to grade the colleges themselves, what grade would you give to private colleges?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
A	23.7	21.1
B	57.2	58.6
C	16.7	18.4
D	1.6	2.0
F	0.8	0.0

Grading Virginia's Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities
What grade would you give Virginia's public four-year colleges and universities?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
A	31.2	31.3
B	49.2	50.0
C	16.2	15.3
D	3.5	3.4
F	0.0	0.0

Grading Virginia's Community Colleges
What grade would you give Virginia's two-year community colleges?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
A	21.2	22.2
B	47.7	49.4
C	26.5	25.3
D	4.2	3.1
F	0.4	0.0

Access and Costs

Entrance Requirements
Should Virginia's four-year public colleges and universities raise their entrance requirements?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	30.1	28.2
No	69.9	71.8

Access
How important is it for every qualified Virginian to be able to attend a college? Do you consider it very important, fairly important, not too important or not important at all?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Very important	63.3	58.6
Fairly important	31.1	32.7
Not too important	4.7	7.3
Not at all important	0.9	1.4

Tuition
Tuitions in Virginia's public colleges are among the highest in the South. Do you feel that tuitions are too high, too low or about right?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Too high	49.7	34.6
About right	48.8	62.8
Too low	1.5	2.7

Private Education Scholarships
Currently, the state provides a scholarship fund of about $1000 to every Virginia student attending a private college in-state. Are your aware of this scholarship?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	22.5	15.2
No	77.5	84.8

Do you favor or oppose these taxpayer-funded scholarships to Virginians attending private colleges?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	52.1	56.9
Oppose	47.9	43.1

Tax Increases for Public Higher Education
If Virginia's public colleges said they needed much more money to keep tuitions down and improve quality, would you favor or oppose a tax increase for this purpose?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	54.4	58.5
Oppose	45.6	41.5

Community Colleges

Awareness of Local Community Colleges
Can you name a community college in your area?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	94.6	94.5
No	5.4	5.5

Economic Importance of Community Colleges
Community colleges provide training for youth over 18 years old and adults. How important is this to the economy of your community? Would you say it's very important, fairly important, not too important or not important at all?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Very important	60.3	62.3
Fairly important	34.6	31.2
Not too important	4.2	5.1
Not important at all	0.9	1.4

Community College Tuitions
Currently Virginia's community colleges charge almost $800 per year in tuition while 10 years ago they charged about $150 per year. Do you feel community college tuition is too high, too low or about right?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Too high	33.1	30.9
About right	64.8	67.1
Too low	2.2	1.9

The Best Public Four-Year Colleges in Virginia

If a relative asked you to recommend a four-year college for their children, which four would you recommend?

	Percentage of respondents mentioning school
	Virginia
University of Virginia	65.1
Virginia Polytech	48.8
William & Mary	41.9
James Madison	25.6
George Mason	21.1
Virginia Commonwealth	14.5
Old Dominion	11.8
Radford	5.2
Other	36.3
	Northern Virginia
University of Virginia	73.6
George Mason	57.5
Virginia Polytech	56.3
William and Mary	48.3
James Madison	24.1
Virginia Commonwealth	6.9
Radford	6.3
Old Dominion	4.6
Other	36.8

Environmental Problems of the Chesapeake

Awareness of Problems

In the last few years, scientists have become concerned about pollution of the Chesapeake Bay. Have you heard about problems of pollution in the Bay?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	92.1	94.2
No	7.9	5.8

Regulation of Fertilizers and Pesticides

Scientists have suggested several steps that Virginia might take to reduce pollution of the Bay. Would you tell me if you favor or oppose each of the following: Laws to regulate the use of fertilizers and pesticides?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	88.9	92.0
Oppose	11.1	8.0

Regulation of the Use of Privately Owned Wetlands

Laws to regulate the use of privately owned wetlands, such as swamps and marshes?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	79.2	77.8
Oppose	20.8	22.2

The "Greenhouse Effect"

Awareness of the Problem
Recently, scientists have also become concerned that the earth's climate is getting warmer and weather patterns are changing. This is sometimes called the "greenhouse effect." Have you happened to have heard of this problem?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	81.2	92.4
No	18.8	7.6

Programs to Plant Forests
Scientists have suggested some steps that government might take to keep this problem from getting worse. I'm going to read you several of these suggestions. For each of them, could you tell me if you would favor or oppose it. First, programs to plant more forests?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	96.8	97.3
Oppose	3.2	2.7

Programs to Save Energy
Programs to help people save energy?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	98.3	95.4
Oppose	1.7	4.6

Gas Mileage Standards
Minimum standards for gas mileage in cars?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	74.3	73.8
Oppose	25.7	26.2

Higher Energy Taxes
Higher taxes on gasoline, electricity, natural gas and other kinds of energy?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	21.4	33.8
Oppose	78.6	66.2

Nuclear Power
More construction of nuclear power plants?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Favor	34.0	40.6
Oppose	61.6	53.0
Other, "it depends"	4.5	6.4

Household Recycling

Many scientists are also concerned about problems of trash disposal. One solution they have proposed is recycling of bottles, cans and paper. If there were a recycling program in your community, would you be willing to separate your household trash into separate containers for glass, paper, metal and all other trash before it was collected?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	93.7	93.2
No	6.3	6.8

Appendix One: Characteristics of the Sample

Place of Residence

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Town	68.1	90.0
Country	31.9	10.0

Level of Education

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Not a high school graduate	12.6	5.4
High school graduate	44.6	18.4
Some college	24.2	28.3
Bachelor's degree	20.9	30.5
Graduate work	10.4	17.4

Attended Virginia College

Have you ever attended a college in Virginia? (Asked only of respondents who had attended college.)

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	52.1	41.0
No	47.9	59.0

Has anyone else in your immediate family attended a college in Virginia?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	54.7	47.7
No	45.3	52.3

Age

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Under 30	24.2	29.0
30-39	24.0	25.3
40-49	19.1	19.9
50-59	12.5	11.8
60-69	13.3	8.1
70 and over	6.7	5.9

Politics and Voting

In terms of politics, do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Republican	47.2	56.7
Democratic	34.4	30.5
Independent	18.4	12.9

Are you currently registered to vote?

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Yes	78.5	80.9
No	21.5	19.1

Race/Ethnicity

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Black	17.2	5.6
White	78.4	86.6
Other minority	4.4	7.8

Sex

	Virginia Percent	Northern Virginia Percent
Male	44.0	49.1
Female	56.0	50.9

Appendix Two: How the Study Was Conducted

The data presented in this report were collected through telephone interviews with a random sample of Virginians. This appendix provides technically oriented readers with information on the methods used in the study.

Sample. The population to be sampled was defined as Virginians over 18 capable of responding to an English language telephone interview. Since we wanted to learn about the views of Northern Virginians as well as the overall views of Commonwealth residents, we actually drew two samples, one of Northern Virginia (Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon and Prince William Counties and the Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church) and of the rest of the Commonwealth. Overall, 231 interviews were conducted with citizens of Northern Virginia and 286 with citizens in the rest of the Commonwealth. Results for Northern Virginia are based on the 231 interviews, while those for the entire Commonwealth are based on combining the two samples using the appropriate sampling weights to insure that the results are representative of the state as a whole.

Telephone numbers to be used in the study were obtained from Survey Sampling, Inc. The details of the sampling procedure are described in their "Description of Sampling Procedures" (Survey Sampling, Inc., 1988.). They are essentially equivalent to simple random digit dialing but produce higher "hit" rates (larger proportions of working phones) and are thus more efficient than random digit dialing. The sampling procedure produces results representative of the state as whole with the caveat that individuals living in households without telephones cannot be reached. We estimate that over 96% of the households in Northern Virginia and over 89% of the households in the rest of the state have working phones.

Once a household was contacted, we asked to interview the "person currently living in the household who was over 18 and who had the most recent birthday." This method eliminates serious biases introduced by interviewing the first person to answer the phone. Note that the sampling procedure first samples households then individuals within households.

Response Rates. We have calculated our response rates as number of interviews divided by number of interviews plus the number of people who refused to be interviewed. For Northern Virginia, the response rate was 49%, for the rest of the Virginia, 53%, for a response rate for the combined weighted sample of 52%. These response rates are typical for public opinion surveys of this sort.

Interviewing. Interviews were conducted from 5-9 p.m. weekdays and from 10 a.m.-9 p.m. on weekends. Interviewing took place every day from 12/7/88 to 12/21/88. Interviewers were trained and supervised by Laura Lund and Thomas Dietz. The interviews were of very high quality, with good comprehension on the part of respondents and relatively high rates of completion once interviews were initiated.

Data Analysis. Responses were coded by Denice Sullivan, Laura Lund and Thomas Dietz. After responses were entered into a data file they were proofed against the original questionnaires to eliminate coding and data entry errors. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS-PC+.

Quality of the Results. Standard statistical procedures such as those used to calculate the standard errors and confidence intervals for this data take account of sampling and other random errors. Nonresponse and errors in respondent understanding or honesty also introduce errors into survey results. The exact magnitude of these errors cannot be estimated, but readers of this report should be aware that such errors exist in this and any other survey. The care taken in conducting this survey cannot eliminate such errors, but we are confident that our results allow valid generalization to the adult population of Virginia and Northern Virginia and are at least as accurate as those of comparable public opinion surveys.

The Authors

J. Wade Gilley, Ph.D., is senior vice president at George Mason University and director of the Center for Policy and Futures Study in Education. He authored *Searching for Academic Excellence* (Macmillan, 1986) and is a member of the National Advisory Council on Educational Research and Improvement.

Thomas Dietz, Ph.D., is Director of the Northern Virginia Survey Research Laboratory and Associate Professor of Sociology at George Mason University. His publications include *The Risk Professionals* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1987) and *Handbook for Environmental Planning* (Wiley, 1977). He has served as a consultant to two U.S. Secretaries of Health, Education and Welfare, to the Inter-American Development Bank and to more than a dozen private firms and state agencies.